

Building Health from the Neighborhood Up in Southwest Washington

Opportunity

How to make lasting changes to improve health is a question that motivated a group of seemingly unlikely partners to coalesce around community-based prevention in the southwest corner of Washington State. Residents in the four-county region of Clark, Cowlitz, Skamania and Wahkiakum struggled with high rates of smoking and obesity, which lead to increased risk for chronic diseases including cancer, stroke, diabetes and heart disease. Recognizing shared challenges, the group set out to find a common solution.

Action

In 2012, the Healthy Living Collaborative solidified a multi-sector partnership of 41 organizations representing public health, health care, social services, faith communities, tribal organizations and the private sector. This group works together to support community-based health solutions. Built on a long history of regional cooperation, the collaborative has an established community-led governance structure, a flexible funding pool and a network of Community Health Worker initiatives designed from the ground up to address the root causes of poor health. Their approach is three-fold:

- **Focus on community-based engagement and prevention.** This means starting with community needs and responding with community-based strategies, like building a network of neighborhood-based Community Health Workers. This trained group of 27 recognized community leaders creates a unified voice for policy and systems change. They connect neighborhoods to system-level efforts and ensure policy and systems work is in service to and support of local solutions.
- **Work collectively to respond to community need.** By establishing a community-led governance structure, the collaborative supports upstream solutions and flexible, pooled resources that respond to local health priorities.
- **Weave health into all policies and services.** The collaborative supports local policy, systems and environmental (PSE) change strategies, and works to place community health at the center of all decision-making. They also developed a statewide policy agenda that supports community voices in state-level policy efforts impacting southwest Washington.

Impact

The collaborative has braided public and private dollars to support and sustain this work. Initial work was funded in part by the Community Transformation Grant. By leveraging a small amount of these federal dollars, the collaborative has raised over \$1.2 million in public and private funding. They now have dedicated staff and secured funding for up to three years. **They also receive federal funding from the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant and the Healthy Communities Obesity, Diabetes, Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program (1422).** Both grants are part of the Prevention and Public Health Fund. With a rich history of cross-sector partnership, the Healthy Living Collaborative is ensuring communities are defined not by challenges but by their capacity to meet them. They are listening to community voices and creating opportunities for healthy changes that respond to neighborhood needs and will last for generations to come.

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Healthy Living Collaborative

<http://healthylivingcollaborative.org>

